1161

Paula J. Dobriansky

Current
Policy
No. 1161

The Baltic States in an Era of Soviet Reform

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is an address by Paula J. Dobriansky, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, before the Baltic American Freedom League, Cleveland, Ohio, March 11, 1989.

I am very pleased to be here tonight and have an opportunity to address an important subject—U.S. policy toward the Baltic states in an era of Soviet reform. But before I proceed with this speech, I would like to relay to you some of my personal experiences in Latvia. I visited Riga in November 1986 as part of the U.S. delegation to the Chautauqua conference. And while my stay was brief, I can honestly say that it produced a lasting impression and a real insight into some unique characteristics of the Baltic people. We had a number of Latvian Americans on the U.S. delegation, and watching them interact with the Latvians in Riga was something not to be forgotten. I was truly touched by the sincerity and the intense patriotism of the Latvians, manifested by their pride in their countrymen who have accomplished so much in America and came back to Riga as U.S. representatives.

Our presence in Riga was also a strong testament to our unwavering concern and interest in the plight of the Baltic peoples. I am sure many of you recall Ambassador Jack Matlock's stirring speech in which he opened in Latvian and staunchly reaffirmed our nonrecognition of the forced incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union.

The Baltic countries have always held a special place in American policy. In fact, the United States was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania after the collapse of czarist Russia. We have, of course, large numbers of Americans of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian descent, such as yourselves, who retain a strong interest in the developments in the Baltic states. And the drama of proud people—relatively few in numbers but high in spirit—fighting to restore democracy and to preserve their national identity touches the very foundation of American ethos.

In the post-World War II era, the fate of the Baltics has been dominated by a single stark fact: Soviet annexation of these three nations. The refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the forced incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet empire has been a longstanding and fundamental tenet of American policy toward the Soviet Union. Throughout the years, we also have strongly protested human rights violations in these Baltic states and other repressive Soviet measures directed at stifling the democratic and nationalist aspirations of the Baltic people. These policies have been a constant facet of the overall U.S. strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union and will be maintained until the free, proud, Baltic people achieve democracy and genuine national self-determination. As you well know, however, in the last few years a number of positive changes have taken place in the Soviet Union. Such changes are part of the broad societal and economic reforms being carried out by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's reforms, dubbed *glasnost* and *perestroika*, have been felt throughout the Soviet Union and especially in the three Baltic states. These developments have spawned a number of challenges as well as opportunities for U.S. policy—a subject I want to address tonight. However, to appreciate fully the events of today, one must begin by looking back at the evolution of Soviet policy toward Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and the U.S. response. So let me begin at the beginning.

Baltic History

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge that the Baltic countries have a long and proud tradition, distinctive history, culture, arts, and vibrant nationalist spirit. In fact, they evolved historically as part of the Western cultural, spiritual, and economic sphere—quite separate and distinct from Russian tradition and culture. However, occupying a key piece of strategic territory along the Baltic littoral, the history of the Baltic people has not been an easy one. It is largely the history of relentless efforts to maintain national sovereignty in the face of foreign invasions. Over the centuries,

S1.71/4:

READEX FICHE best copy available

numerous foreign predators craved Baltic territory, its mineral riches, and the fruits of labor of its hardworking people. In fact, I am struck by this theme in my reading of Baltic forklore, where most of the national heroes are leaders of resistance to foreign invaders. And, of these, the Baltic people have seen more than their share.

Latvians, for example, had to fight against the Livonian Order, as well as against the Poles, Swedes, and finally, the Russians. Yet, while the candle of Latvian freedom has been extinguished many times by brutal foreign oppression, it has rekindled itself time and again. And, at all times, it has continued to burn brightly in the hearts of Latvian people everywhere. One of the most important factors in Latvian history is Latvia's tenacious memory of its ancient quest for freedom and just governance, symbolized by the sunken "Castle of Light." One of the most revered national heroes is "Lacplesis," the Bear Slayer, who succeeded in raising for a while the Castle of Light, only to lose it again to the Black Knight because of the treachery of one of his lieutenants. To me, it is a poignant reminder of another tragic moment in Latvian history, when the patriots struggled against impossible odds to protect their national freedom and dignity.

When I look at Lithuanian history, I am struck by yet another larger-than-life figure, Grand Duke Gediminas, founder of the Lithuanian state in the 14th century, who valiantly fought against the Teutonic knights and the Tatars. The history of Estonia is also rich in heroic deeds and remarkable feats of battling foreign invaders. One such episode—still remembered by the Estonian people—was the struggle with the Danish King Waldemar II, who, after a protracted and brutal campaign, seized the Estonian stronghold of Kalevanlinna, located on the site of modern Tallinn. The Estonian national hero, Kalev, also had more than a fair share of battling the evil forces. Yet martial valor and a willingness to die in the defense of one's country are not the only attributes of the Baltic people. We also see remarkable industriousness and a rich artistic and literary tradition.

In modern times, the three Baltic nations were able to enjoy only a brief taste of national independence from 1918 to 1940. During this time, they developed genuine democracy and achieved high rates of economic growth. Their freedom and prosperity were, however, brutally extinguished by Moscow, as a result of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Soviet conduct violated all norms of international law and constituted naked aggression against defenseless and peaceful neighbors.

In 1940, a dark cloud descended upon the Baltic nations. Literally thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were jailed, deported, or murdered at the hands of the Soviet secret police. The Soviets made a special effort to annihilate the Baltic intelligentsia: scientists, artists, and all men and women who manifested any pride in their heritage or a sense of nationalism. The years of World War II and the German occupation brought additional suffering to the Baltic nations. After the war, proud patriots from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania fought against the reoccupation of their homelands by the Red Army. They held out until well into the 1950s. In the end, massive Soviet military might crushed the nationalist movements. Another wave of ruthless arrests, deportations, and murders of the Baltic people followed. Concomitantly, Moscow sought to break their spirit and destroy their ethnic heritage and culture by forcing the use of the Russian language in the workplace, courts, government offices, and institutions of learning.

Efforts to force Russification on the Baltic states continued unabated. Even ethnic Baltic communists were entrusted with only largely ceremonial posts in the party and government machinery. All key functions were either controlled directly from Moscow or discharged by local Russian officials. Moscow also directed the emigration of a large influx of Russian and other slavs into the three Baltic nations. As a result, by 1988 the percentage of ethnic Latvians in Latvia dropped to less than 50%, about 60% of the Estonian population were ethnic Estonians, and only Lithuanians were doing somewhat better—80% of their population remained ethnic Lithuanians. But the Baltic people stubbornly clung to their heritage, educating the young about their history and culture. Remarkably, they also retained their industrious spirit producing the highest living standards of any region under Soviet control.

Until most recently, the Soviet human rights record in the Baltics was abysmal. Particularly treated harshly were nationalists and religious believers. For example, brave individuals who signed the 1979 "Baltic Appeal" calling for a repudiation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and restoration of national sovereignty for the Baltic states were imprisoned. Numerous bishops, nuns, priests, and other clergy were arrested or banned from performing their pastroal duties. Religious property was confiscated, and many churches and other houses of worship were closed or converted to nonreligious uses.

U.S. Views on Baltic Independence

The U.S. Government's policy toward the Baltic states has always been consistent and clear. We never recognized the forcible and unlawful Soviet annexation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. As part of this policy, we have continued to extend full diplomatic privileges and immunities to the lawful diplomatic representatives in the United States of the last independent governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the United States. These are not just courtesies but important statements with significant international legal ramifications.

We have also regularly stated our views on this subject in various international forums. Thus, for example, we made the following statement during the 1980 Madrid review meeting of the Helsinki Final Act:

> The United States does not recognize the illegal incorporation, by force of arms, of the States of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia by the Soviet Union. I [the deputy chief of the U.S. delegation] would also recall the statement in Principle IV [territorial integrity of states] that no occupation or acquisition of territory in contravention of international law will be recognized as legal. And I would reiterate my government's consistent interpretation that this provision is applicable to the Baltic states.

We also have used the United Nations to articulate our views regarding the independence of the Baltic states. In July 1983, to commemorate the 61st anniversary of the *de jure* recognition of the three Baltic states by the United States, President Ronald Reagan had sent a letter to the UN Secretary General stating as follows:

> Americans share the just aspirations of the Baltic nations for national independence. We cannot remain silent in the face of the continued refusal of the Government of the U.S.S.R. to allow these people to be free. We uphold their right to determine their own national destiny; a right contained in the Helsinki declaration which affirms that all people always have the right, in full freedom, to determine, when and as they wish, their internal and external political status, without external interference, and to pursue as they wish their political, economic, social, and cultural development. For this reason, the Government of the United States has never recognized the forced in-

corporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union and will not do so in the future.

Our nonrecognition policy has been expressed in other substantive and symbolic ways. Each year, the Secretary of State sends formal greetings to the three Baltic missions in the United States on their respective national days. Secretary Baker has continued this practice and conveyed greetings to Mr. Jaakson, Consul General of Estonia, and Mr. Lozoraitis, Charge d'Affaires of Lithuania, in February for their 1989 celebrations. As specified in congressional legislation, June 14 is designated as Baltic Freedom Day, and numerous official ceremonies and events take place every year on that date. In 1983, we established a separate Baltic Service Division within Radio Free Europe. The State Department has a special Baltic Affairs Desk in the European Bureau.

We also have instituted the practice of producing separate reports on the three Baltic countries as a part of our annual country human rights reports. In general, our policy has been based on the resolute rejection of what former Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams aptly termed the "realist myth"—that the Soviet incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is a fact of life, and the world had better reconcile itself to this reality. We regret such cynicism. Given our own democratic institutions and American struggle for independence, it cannot be any other way. We must base our policy on the principle of national self-determination enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence and the UN Charter. We fully support the efforts of the Baltic peoples to exercise their inalienable right of national self-determination.

Changes in the Baltic Republics

While our policy has remained steadfast, we are pleased to note and acknowledge positive changes which have recently taken place in the Baltic nations. These changes are attributable to the Soviet realization that their political and economic system is not working, and that their practice of stifling the nationalist aspirations of other people is morally bankrupt and politically counterproductive. And we take some credit for helping convince the Soviet leaders of these realities—our resolute policy and the buildup of American strength certainly have played a role in improving Moscow's leading curve. But the lion's share of the credit goes, of course, to the brave Baltic people, who have been fighting for their dreams all of these long years.

In many respects, changes in the Baltic republics have been truly dramatic. In Estonia, the hardline chief of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP), Karl Vaino, was replaced in 1988 with a more reasonable Vaino Valjas. But by far the most important and encouraging development has been the creation of the Estonian Popular Front. This grassroots political organization has thousands of members, and its rallies have attracted thousands of Estonians. The front has a strong political program aimed at regaining the right of Estonians to control their own political, economic, and cultural affairs. Many of the front's proposals have been adopted by the Estonian Supreme Soviet and the ECP. Among other things, the Supreme Soviet passed a law, declaring Estonian to be the official language of the republic. In November 1988, the Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution allowing it to reject any all-union legislation, including constitutional amendments. The Supreme Soviet also declared that all Estonian national resources belong to Estonia, legalized private ownership, stated that any violations of constitutional rights could be brought before a court of law, and declared the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be applicable in Estonia. We regret, however, that the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet declared Estonia's legislation on the right to veto all-union legislation to be null and void and has enlisted ECP's support. Moscow has also launched a wave of denunciations in the Soviet central press of actions of the Estonian Supreme Soviet and of the Estonian Popular Front.

In Latvia, we also have witnessed numerous positive changes. November 11 was designated Lacplesis' Day to honor Latvia's heroes. This holiday, and the ceremonial raising of the maroon-white-maroon traditional Latvian flag, were observed for the first time since the end of World War II. The authorities also permitted the establishment of the People's Front of Latvia and allowed it to host an event at the National Theater, where Latvia's independence was proclaimed some 70 years ago. The Latvian People's Front now has more than 200,000 members. It sponsors numerous demonstrations celebrating previously forbidden national events and anniversaries. The Latvian press has published articles on such heretofore forbidden subjects as the Soviet takeover of Latvia and mass deportations of Latvians to Siberia. However, just as in the case of Estonia, the Soviet central press has continued to attack the actions of the People's Front of Latvia.

Some positive developments also have taken place in the area of religious freedom. The Soviet authorities restored the right to preach of Latvian Bishop Kazimir Dulbinskis of Riga, who has been prevented from carrying out his ministry for 40 years. A religious publication, banned since 1940, *Catholic Life*, was also allowed to resume publication.

In Lithuania, the primary source of reforms has been the Lithunian Restructuring Movement (*sajudis*). *Sajudis* has called for greater economic, political, and cultural autonomy from Moscow and has sponsored numerous demonstrations and rallies. On February 15–16, it organized a celebration of Lithuania Independence Day—the first such commemoration since 1940. Bowing to popular pressure, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet declared this to be an official holiday. The Supreme Soviet has also declared Lithuanian to be the official language of the republic. *Sajudis* has played an active role in Lithuanian political life by campaigning to elect its candidates to a new Soviet national congress. It hopes to capture at least 30 of Lithuania's 42 seats in the congress. As a conciliatory gesture, however, *sajudis* withdrew two candidates who intended to challenge Lithuania's highest ranking Communist Party officials: Algirdas Brazauskas and Vladimir Berezov.

In July 1988, the Lithuanian Freedom League, a group that has been operating underground since 1978, declared that it would now function openly. Its stated goal is the re-establishment of full national independence for Lithuania. The group has staged numerous rallies and sponsored a hunger strike in Gediminas Square in Vilnius, calling for the release of all Lithuanian political prisoners. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Restructuring Movement also campaigned for legislation, similar to that adopted by the Estonian Supreme Soviet, regarding the right to veto U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet legislation.

Considerable progress was made in the area of religion. In May 1988, Pope John Paul announced that the Bishop of Kaisiadorys, Vincentas Sladkevicius, would be elevated to the College of Cardinals. Soviet authorities lifted their ban on Sladkevicius who had not been allowed to perform his pastoral duties for over 25 years. The authorities also agreed to return St. Casimir's Church in Vilnius and the Queen of Peace

Church in Klaipeda. It was also announced on March 4, 1989, that the relics of St. Casimir, the patron saint of Lithuania, are to be returned to the Vilnius Cathedral. Also approved has been the publication of a Catholic biweekly magazine—*Kathiliku Pasaulis (Catholic World)*—the first official religious publication in Lithuania since 1940.

Soviet Policy

Despite these positive changes, some Soviet authorities have remained hostile to the popular fronts and even toward the official legislatures of the three Baltic states. The Soviet central press has published numerous critical articles on Baltic activism. There also appears to be official backing for the anti-Baltic and proethnic Russian groups now appearing in the Baltic states. These pro-Soviet organizations are known as Inter-Movement in Estonia and Inter-Front in Latvia.

Moscow also has established a special Politburo commission, chaired by the ideology chief Vadim A. Medvedev. This commission includes the former KGB chief Viktor M. Chebrikov. Its activities have included calling to Moscow senior Baltic communists and pressing them to take a harder line toward the national fronts. Most importantly, while arbitrary arrests, detentions, and other human rights violations in the Baltic republics have eased considerably during the last several years, no promised changes in the Soviet penal code, which would abolish laws used to repress legitimate political activities, have been implemented so far.

Where Does U.S. Policy Go From Here?

Having said a lot about where we have been and where we presently are, the real question you all probably have been asking yourselves is where does U.S. policy go from here. Let me assure you of one thing, the U.S. nonrecognition policy will continue. As I mentioned before, this policy is based on the fundamental principles of international law which indicate that any acquisition of territory based on aggression is unlawful and that all peoples have an inalienable right to self-determination. It should be up to the Baltic people to choose their national destiny, and I want you to know that the Bush Administration remains committed to this principle.

We also intend to continue our present policy of closely monitoring human rights developments in the Baltics and pressing the Soviets for further positive changes. In particular, we expect and would insist upon the institutionalization of human rights reforms. They must become irreversible and independent of political winds blowing from Moscow. We also believe that we should establish and maintain regular contacts with a range of emerging political, social, and ecological informal groups in the Baltic states, including all of the popular fronts. In this process, we hope that people like you will continue to play an active role. A first and very important step is information sharing. We need to engage these groups in dialogue and share with them our ideas, our knowledge of issues concerning them, and the tenets of our democratic processes.

In the weeks and months ahead, we will deal with the challenges and opportunities presented by change in the Baltic states. Such issues as that of trade shows, passports, and representation in international organizations will be considered. In this regard, the Administration is cognizant of and sensitive to the Baltic-American community's views and concerns. As events unfold in the Baltic states, we must keep in close touch so as to deal most effectively with change. We look forward to receiving your views and working together closely toward realizing our common objectives: democracy, economic prosperity, and genuine national self-determination for the Baltic people. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • April 1989
Editor: Sharon R. Haynes • This material is in the public domain and may be reprinted without permission; citation of this source is appreciated.

PA/OAP, Rm. 5815A
United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE $300

Address Correction Requested

BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
U.S. Department of State
Permit No. G–130